

# 10 Simple Steps to Exegesis

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The Bible is not an arcane, esoteric book filled with mysteries. God created language and He created the human brain to be able to understand language. This must be the starting place in our discussion on interpretation. God spoke the things of this universe into creation. God spoke to Adam and Adam understood God. While we cannot ignore the effects of the Fall upon Adam and humanity, we can see that throughout the Old Testament, God continued to speak and men continued to understand and obey Him.

Words having meaning. Words are not abstract symbols that require a special decoding mechanism to be understood. Words mean what they mean. I do acknowledge that words can have more than one meaning but meaning is determined often by context.

Hermeneutics refers to the tools and processes we use to determine the meaning of a text. Exegesis is one tool of hermeneutics. Exegesis is an explanation of the text by critical analysis. It is a process that is used in the creation of sermons but also has value in personal Bible study. In this paper, I will outline a simple process to move from the Text to an Exegetical Sermon. This process can be used to preach through a book of the Bible or for a single sermon.

**1) Read the Book in one sitting.** This is the starting place for understanding any text. A Bible passage does not stand alone (some verses in the Proverbs are an exception). The passage is found in the flow of a larger context. Each Book of the Bible has a specific theme and purpose. Each passage relates to the overall theme and purpose of the Book. To understand a passage, we must first see where it fits and how it relates to the overall message of the Book.

**2) Outline the book.** By outlining the book, we see how the author is accomplishing his purpose. We see the topics and themes of the Book that support the purpose of the author. The outline can also serve as a foundation for making text divisions that can be developed into sermons.

**3) Identify the theme of the book.** We must not rely on the headings and divisions of the Bible. We must determine the theme of the Book for ourselves and the themes of each. In this way, we then can see how all the passages fit together and relate to the purpose of the Book.

**4) Research and identify the setting of the book.** Many times, we can identify the setting of the Book from the text itself. The historical setting will help us to see the condition of the audience and the motivation of the author.

**5) Identify the passage you intend to preach.** By taking the outline we made, we can now make further divisions for the particular passages we will preach. This can often be confusing in the beginning as there are no hard and fast rules on how to divide a text. I recommend that if exegetical preaching is new to you that you consider preaching a paragraph. A paragraph contains sentences that relate to one thought. This thought then will be the theme of the sermon and it will be developed from the sentences in the paragraph.

**6) Block diagram and sentence diagram.** Block diagramming is an exercise that helps us to do a syntactical analysis of the passage. We can see how the words and phrase fit together. Then we see the dependent and independent clauses, the imperatives, etc. to determine the points of the author.

**7) Identify the main thought of the passage.** The work you have done above will help you find the main point. Generally speaking, this should be the main point of your sermon.

**8) Develop other issues if necessary.** You should ask is there doctrine, symbols, types, hard saying, cultural issues, historical events that are relevant to the passage and point? We should seek to understand these first to see if they impact your explanation. If they do not, then they should not be included in the sermon.

This would also be the place for word studies. I must say that a word study is only a small part of a sermon and it not always necessary. The key as to whether or not we will include a word study is if it (a) supports the main theme (b) is necessary for understanding the point of the text and (c) if the word study would give greater depth or meaning to our preaching points. I caution you here to avoid "root ward" fallacy.

**9) What did the passage mean to "them then?"** All this work is to determine the meaning. If our job is to explain the meaning of the text, we must know what it means. The historical setting and the grammatical arrangement are how the meaning is determined. Whatever the passage meant when it was written is what it means to us now.

**10) Create a sermon outline.** Start with the end in mind. Only include those elements that support and lead to your main point and conclusion. Fill in your outline by creating a complete manuscript. Writing out a complete manuscript will ensure your thoughts flow and that your sermon is building to your conclusion.

#### **Cautions:**

- 1) NO allegory
- 2) NO moralism ("thou shalt/we need to do this/be ...")
- 3) NO cleverness (alliteration, stories, etc.)
- 4) NO root-word fallacy

**Other resources:**

*Toward a Theological Exegesis* by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

*Exegetical Fallacies* by D.A. Carson

*Preaching* by G. Campbell Morgan

*The Art of Prophesying* by William Perkins

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